

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRAGUE 0013

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TAGS: PFOR, CZ, UR
SUBJECT: CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE USSR: FRUITS OF FRATERNAL FRIENDSHIP

SUMMARY: AS WE ENTER A YEAR OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR CSSR-USSR
RELATIONS, WE BRIEFLY REVIEW THE STATE OF THOSE RELATIONS. WE
CONCLUDE THAT IN THE THIRTY YEARS SINCE 1947, THOSE RELATIONS HAVE
REMAINED REMARKABLY STABLE, WITH CZECHOSLOVAKIA BEING MADE A MODEL OF
A MANNERLY LITTLE SATELLITE AND RECEIVING FEW CARROTS IN RETURN BY
COMPARISON WITH SOME OF ITS MORE UNRULY ALLIES. END SUMMARY.

"WITH THE SOVIET UNION FOR ALL TIME - AND NEVER OTHERWISE..."
- KLEMENT GOTTWALD

1. 1977 WILL MARK THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TIME THE
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CZECHOSLOVAK COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP FIRST LEARNED THE FULL
REALITY OF ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP. ON JULY 4,
1947 THE CZECHOSLOVAK NATIONAL FRONT GOVERNMENT HEADED BY COMMUNIST
PRIME MINISTER GOTTWALD CAME OUT AT THE PARIS CONFERENCE IN FAVOR
OF CZECHOSLOVAK PARTICIPATION IN THE MARSHALL PLAN. ALMOST OVERNIGHT
IT WAS FORCED BY STALIN TO REVERSE THAT POSITION. GOTTWALD,
PROBABLY FEELING THE EXECUTIONER'S BREATH ON HIS NECK, LEARNED

A LESSON THAT HE AND ALL BUT ONE OF HIS SUCCESSORS NEVER FORGOT -- TO PARAPHRASE SCRIPTURE: "THE FEAR OF THE SOVIET UNION IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM." THAT HAS SINCE BEEN THE GUIDING LIGHT OF CZECHOSLOVAK FOREIGN AND (WITH BRIEF EXCEPTION OF 1968) DOMESTIC POLICY.

2. WITH THE USUAL EXCEPTION OF BULGARIA, ALL JUNIOR MEMBERS OF THE WARSAW PACT HAVE WORKED OUT SOME TRADE-OFF WITH THE USSR IN THEIR FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICIES; THOSE THAT WANT TO PURSUE A SOMEWHAT INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY COURSE HAVE HIGHLY RESTRICTIVE INTERNAL REGIMES; THOSE THAT WANT (OR FEEL FORCED) TO GIVE THEIR POPULACES SOME FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND CONSUMER SATISFACTION ARE TOTALLY RESPONSIVE TO THE SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY LINE. OF THESE COUNTRIES CZECHOSLOVAKIA APPEARS TO GIVE MORE AND GET LESS AND THUS HAS THE WORST OF BOTH WORLDS. NO WP MEMBER IS MORE LOYAL TO THE SOVIET FOREIGN LINE, NONE MORE READY TO SERVE AS A QUADRAPHONIC HI-FI MOUTHPIECE FOR SOVIET INITIATIVES IN INTERNATIONAL

BODIES, NONE MORE VOCALLY DEVOTED TO THE PRINCIPLES OF "PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM" AND LOYALTY TO THE "SOCIALIST COMMONWEALTH" AND NONE MORE OPPOSED TO DEVIATIONS FROM THE SOVIET LINE.

3. WHAT DOES IT GET FOR THIS? A GOOD STANDARD OF LIVING FOR ITS PEOPLE IN TERMS OF CONSUMER GOODS -- AS RECENTLY DEMONSTRATED DURING THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY -- BUT NOT YET OF HOUSING, AND A FREEDOM TO KEEP REPRESSION OF DISSENT MUTED ALTHOUGH EVER-PRESENT, I.E. TO USE HARASSMENT INSTEAD OF IMPRISONMENT IN MOST CASES.

4. WHAT DOES IT FAIL TO GET FOR THIS; SPECIAL ATTENTION TO ITS
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APPARENT ECONOMIC NEEDS. AS WE HAVE NOTED IN EARLIER REPORTING, THE LEADERSHIP IN POLAND AND THE GDR HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN ABLE TO USE REAL OR POTENTIAL UNRULINESS OF THEIR PEOPLES AS A LEVER TO GAIN ECONOMIC CONCESSIONS, WHILE THE CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERSHIP, WHOSE NEEDS FOR ECONOMIC CONCESSIONS TO MEET ENERGY REQUIREMENTS AND HARD-CURRENCY COSTS OF ACQUIRING WESTERN TECHNOLOGY ARE NO LESS THAN THOSE OF THEIR NORTHERN NEIGHBORS, GETS LITTLE IF ANYTHING. NEITHER THE SOVIET NOR THE CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERSHIP (NOR WE FOR THAT MATTER) BELIEVES THAT THE WORKERS HERE WILL TAKE TO THE STREETS IF PRICES GO UP OR AVAILABILITY OF SOME CONSUMER GOODS --INCLUDING MEAT--GOES DOWN, ALTHOUGH THE LONG-FOLLOWED POLICY OF PRICE STABILITY HAS AVOIDED A TEST OF THIS THEORY. SINCE THE CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERS SHOW NO SIGN OF EXERTING OR WANTING INDEPENDENCE, THE SOVIETS HAVE NO INCENTIVE TO PROVIDE MORE CONCESSIONS.

5. THE POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP: WE BELIEVE THAT SINCE ASSUMING CPCZ LEADERSHIP IN 1969 HUSAK HAS STEADILY DEVELOPED SOVIET CONFIDENCE IN HIM AND IN DOING SO HAS SUCCESSFULLY OUTMANEUVERED

THE HARD-LINERS, SUCH AS BILAK AND INDRA, THAT SOME OBSERVERS
THOUGHT MIGHT SUCCEED IN OUSTING OR DOMINATING HIM. HE HAS DONE
THIS THROUGH A COMBINATION OF WILLINGNESS TO DEMONSTRATE REPEATEDLY
AND FERVENTLY HIS DEVOTION TO THE USSR AND ITS LEADERS AND OF
BEING ABLE TO KEEP CZECHOSLOVAKIA QUIET AND STABLE WITHIN THE
WARSAW PACT. HE SKILLFULLY ROOTED OUT AND DEALT WITH THE
MAVERICKS OF THE PRAGUE SPRING WITHOUT BEING FORCED TO USE THE
SORT OF OVERTLY HARSH METHODS THAT MIGHT HAVE MADE THEIR
TREATMENT A CONTINUING INTERNATIONAL CAUSE CELEBRE. HIS FREQUENT
VIOLENT, VERBAL ATTACKS ON THESE SAME PEOPLE OF 1968(WHICH
SELDOM ARE QUOTED IN THE LOCAL PRESS) APPEAR TO BE SUFFICIENT TO
AVERT ACCUSATIONS OF "SOFTNESS." IT IS TEMPTING TO SUGGEST THAT
HUSAK'S PREFERENCE NOT TO JAIL DISCREDITED FORMER LEADERS
ARISES FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCES IN PRISON IN THE FIFTIES, BUT
THEN, HIS METHOD OF DEALING WITH THEM AND OTHER DISSIDENTS IS
ONLY SOMEWHAT MORE GENTLE THAN THE WAY DISSIDENTS HAVE BEEN
TREATED IN RECENT YEARS IN BREZHNEV'S MOSCOW. IN ANY CASE,
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HUSAK APPEARS TO HAVE THE KREMLIN'S CONFIDENCE, TO THE EXTENT
THAT HE IS ALMOST IGNORED AS THE KREMLIN TRIES TO DEAL WITH
THE MORE RAMBUNCTIOUS AND TROUBLESOME AMONG ITS SATRAPS.

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6. THE ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP: THIS IS A TOPIC THAT WE HAVE PAID MUCH ATTENTION TO IN THE PAST BUT IS ALSO ONE ON WHICH EXPERTS CAN RIGHTLY DISAGREE. IT IS DIFFICULT TO TELL WITH CERTAINTY HOW MUCH THE READY CZECHOSLOVAK LIP SERVICE TO CEMA ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IS TRANSLATED INTO REALITY, IN SPITE OF FREQUENT EXCHANGES OF VISITS AND SIGNING OF AGREEMENTS BETWEEN MINISTRIES AND ENTERPRISES. IT IS CLEAR THAT, AS CZECHOSLOVAK TECHNOLOGY BECOMES MORE OBSOLETE, THE SOVIET MARKET EVER MORE REPLACES NON-CEMA MARKETS FOR LOCAL MANUFACTURERS AND THAT THE TWO ECONOMIES ARE EVER MORE TIGHTLY LINKED BY CZECHOSLOVAK DEPENDENCE ON THE USSR FOR RAW MATERIALS. WE ASSUME THE SOVIET ATTITUDE ON THIS LATTER POINT IS AMBIVALENT: WELCOMING THE ADDITIONAL LEVERAGE SUCH DEPENDENCE GIVES THE USSR ON THE CZECHOSLOVAK ECONOMY BUT DISPLEASED BY THE INABILITY TO FREE ITS RAW MATERIAL PRODUCTION FROM EASTERN EUROPEAN COMMITMENTS TO PERMIT ITS SALE FOR HARD CURRENCY. WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO GET A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE
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CHANGES IN TERMS OF TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, BUT OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT THEY ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY UNFAVORABLE FOR CZECHOSLOVAKIA ESPECIALLY FOR FURLS, FOR WHICH CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON IMPORTS. OUR TENTATIVE CONCLUSION IS THAT THERE IS SOME MUTUAL DISSATISFACTION WITH THE STRUCTURE OF BILATERAL CSSR-USSR TRADE, BUT NO EASY SOLUTION IN SIGHT.

7. SOVIET TROOPS: THE MOST EGREGIOUS REMNANT OF AUGUST 1968 IS THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF PERHAPS 85,000 SOVIET TROOPS "TEMPORARILY STATIONED IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA." BUT THIS MAY BE A FACTOR MORE IRRITATING TO THE WESTERN OBSERVER THAN TO MOST CZECHOSLOVAKS. THE TROOPS ARE IN THIS COUNTRY, BUT THEY ARE SELDOM SEEN ON THE STREETS OF PRAGUE OR ANY OTHER MAJOR CITY AND NEVER IN LARGE NUMBERS. THEY APPEAR TO BE KEPT CLOSE TO THEIR CAMPS AND UNDER GOOD DISCIPLINE; THE SOVIETS AFTER ALL WISH TO KEEP THE INFLECTION OF CZECH CONSUMERISM FROM AFFECTING THEIR TROOPS. IN SPEAKING WITH AMERICANS, THE CZECHS AND SLOVAKS MAY OCCASIONALLY COMPLAIN ABOUT THE SOVIET PRESENCE, BUT WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO GAUGE HOW MANY OTHERS MAY FEEL SOME QUIET COMFORT AT THE TANGIBLE PRESENCE OF AN ALLY AGAINST THAT MORE TRADITIONAL SOURCE OF DANGER, THE GERMANS.

8. IN CONCLUSION, THE CHARACTER OF CSSR-USSR RELATIONS AT THE NEW YEAR REMAINS REMARKABLY STABLE. SINCE THE 1948 COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER, 1968 HAS BEEN THE ONLY ABERRATION AND, EVEN THEN, THE REPORTAGE BY WESTERN MEDIA OF DOMESTIC CZECHOSLOVAK DEVELOPMENTS

IGNORED THE ABSOLUTE LOYALTY OF CZECHOSLOVAK DIPLOMATS TO THE SOVIET LINE AT THE UN AND ELSEWHERE RIGHT UP UNTIL THE WARSAW PACT INTERVENTION-- AND AT THAT POINT A BREAK CAME ONLY OVER THE INTERVENTION ITSELF, NOT OVER OTHER ISSUES. WE SEE NO REASON TO EXPECT ANY SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAD ITS FLING IN 1968 AND IS NOW AGAIN RESIGNED TO UNREWARDED GOOD BEHAVIOR, WHILE ITS LEADERS CONTINUE TO HOPE THAT ULTRALOYALTY WILL SOONER OR LATER PAY OFF. A HARBINGER OF THE WAY THIS ATTITUDE WILL FIND EXPRESSION IN 1977 IS FOUND IN FOREIGN
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MINISTER CHNOUPEK'S YEAR-END REVIEW OF FOREIGN RELATIONS IN THE DECEMBER 29 PRESS, IN WHICH HE PLEDGES THAT CZECHOSLOVAKIA WILL USE THE APPROACHING 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION TO FURTHER HARMONIZE AND DEEPEN THE UNBREAKABLE FRATERNAL FRIENDSHIP WITH THE USSR AND TO EMPLOY THE USSR'S EXPERIENCE IN BUILDING SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM. IT APPEARS THAT CSSR-USSR FRIENDSHIP MONTH MAY RUN ALL YEAR IN 1977.
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